

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

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Locality

New Ireland is divided into nine main linguistic units, which are further subdivided into smaller units based on differences in dialect. People who live twenty miles distant do not understand each other. There is no tribal, political, or other social relationship between these linguistic units. Even the villages of one linguistic section do not act as a unit. They have no common chief, and until recently, when it was prohibited by the white Government, there was fighting between the villages of the same linguistic unit. To-day there is jealousy and absence of any united feeling among them. It is merely a geographical area, separated from other areas by its language, but other than that it has no cohesion and does not even have a name. The village, with its distinct round of life, its chief, its important old men, its communal rites, its communally owned ground, its gossip and mass of trivial details which make up life, is the largest functioning unit based on locality. To-day, inter-village life within the same linguistic unit is confined mostly to important ritual occasions, when members of near-by villages congregate.

The village is subdivided into hamlets. Lesu, the village where I lived, has 232 inhabitants, and stretches along the coast for about three miles. It is divided into fifteen hamlets, separated from one another by fences and sometimes also by unused land. Each hamlet contains from two to eight houses. The larger hamlets have their men's house and cemetery, and every hamlet has its own communal cooking-ground and sometimes a cookhouse. The only orientation in the arrangement of houses is that the men's house and cemetery are near the sea. Each hamlet also has its name and a community life of its own, apart from its participation in the village life, and its members are frequently close relatives, but not always so. The women cook together and the men assist each other in their fishing and house-building.

INFANCY

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the parents towards the infant are fulfilled, but they must also observe certain sexual taboos during this period of infancy, when the mother is nursing her child, which lasts from two to three years. During this time the mother and her husband are not supposed to have any sexual relations with each other, or with anyone else. As if to avoid temptation (at least with his wife) the man does not sleep in the same house with her. Usually he sleeps in the men's house. However, in the case of Sapirosch's parents, the father slept at home, while the child and her mother slept in the maternal grandmother's house in the same hamlet. The husband eats with his wife and is with her during the day, but they separate at night. It is thought that if the woman indulges in intercourse during this period her milk would be no good. When questioned as to why the taboo should apply to the father, the answer is that if the father comes and lifts up his child or plays with him after he has had intercourse, the infant will smell it from his skin, sicken, and perhaps die. My Lesu friends pointed in proof to one child, who is not able to walk, although past the walking age. I was told that it is because his parents "stole" sexual intercourse while the infant was still being suckled. The same natives point to the good health of the infants, Sapirosch and Ongus the second, and say that it is because the parents of these children have lived in continence. One more sophisticated native who had been away to work at the white man's capital, and who knows that it is the custom of a white man and his wife to have intercourse soon after the birth of their child, regards the white man's practice as disgusting. [186] ●

It is interesting to note in this connection that a man and his wife observe the same sexual taboos, although for a much shorter time, when their pigs are giving birth. The owner of a pregnant pig and his mate are continent when the pig is expected to give birth, and also for the first month that the infant pig is being suckled. Should this taboo be broken it

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